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MAYHEW

THE INDIAN LANGUAGE

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Observations
ON
THE INDIAN LANGUAGE,
BY
EXPERIENCE MAYHEW, A.M.

Observations
ON
THE INDIAN LANGUAGE

BY
EXPERIENCE MAYHEW, A

Preacher of the Gospel to the Indians of Martha's
Vineyard in New England, in 1722.

NOW PUBLISHED FROM THE ORIGINAL MS. BY

JOHN S. H. FOGG, A.M., M.D.

MEMBER OF THE NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY, OF THE VIRGINIA
SOCIETY, AND CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE MAINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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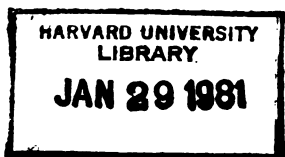
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LETTER OF EXPERIENCE MAYHEW ON THE INDIAN LANGUAGE

THE writer of this letter was of the fourth generation of the
the Worshipful Thomas Mayhew, Esquire, who was
governor of Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, and the
Dorset Islands, under a title from the Earl of Sandwich,
1641.

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lost his father in childhood in 1657, but had "the
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When a very young man he well understood the

¹ Appendix to Mayhew's Indian Converts, 1727.

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LETTER OF EXPERIENCE MAYHEW, 1722, ON THE INDIAN LANGUAGE.

THE writer of this letter was of the fourth descent from the Worshipful Thomas Mayhew, Esquire, patentee and governor of Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, and the Elizabeth Islands, under a title from the Earl of Stirling in 1641.

Combining the influence of proprietorship and civil station with excellence of christian character and life, the family, through several generations, exerted a controlling influence within their domain. But they are most endeared to us by their generous self-devotion to the noble design of civilizing and christianizing the Indians, of whom there were several thousands within their proprietary. It is delightful to find the venerable Eliot and the youthful Cotton in hearty fellowship and personal coöperation with them in their blessed labors.

The Rev. John Mayhew, "who fell not short," says Prince,¹ "either of the eminent genius or piety of his excellent progenitors," lost his father in childhood in 1657, but had "the benefit of his grandfather, the Governor's, wise instruction and his father's library." When a very young man he well understood the language of the

¹ Appendix to Mayhew's Indian Converts, 1727.

Indians, and was able to discourse freely with them, and to preach and pray with them with the greatest readiness. His son, Experience, the writer of this letter now first published, when in the eighth year of his age, went with him to visit the governor in his last illness in 1681, and the youth, in later life, "well remembered his great-grandfather's calling him to his bedside and laying his hands on his head and blessing him in the name of the Lord."

Thus Mr. Mayhew's ancestry and position furnished an hereditary interest in the apostolic mission to the Indian, and nobly, meekly, did he obey the calling. He says that his "grandfather composed a large and excellent Catechism for the Indians of that Island, agreeable unto their own dialect;" his father was in youth as much at home in the Indian tongue as in his own; and being himself in childhood a play-mate with the Indian children, he says, "I learnt the Indian language by rote, as I did my mother tongue, and not by studying the rules of it as the Lattin tongue is comonly learned."

Mr. Gallatin, in his letter to George Folsom, Esq., accounts for the great difference in the orthography of those who have collected vocabularies, as arising from the native languages of the writers, and that it is almost sufficient in that respect to note whether he was an Englishman, a German, Frenchman, &c., and from the difficulty of expressing the guttural sounds and nasal vowels of the Indian speech.* In this respect the remarks of Mr. Mayhew are of peculiar interest from his familiarity with the Indians from childhood, learning by the ear, and catching their cadences and modulations while the organs of speech were flexible and delicate, and could be trained to the nicer differences not to be acquired or even detected in maturer life. We are persuaded that information from so high an authority will be welcome to the ethnologist, especially in view of Mr. Gallatin's suggestion that "it is perhaps less in dictionaries than by an investigation of grammatical forms and structure,

* Trans. of Am. Ant. Soc., vol. ii. 4, 5.

that we must study the philosophy of language and the various ways in which man has applied his faculties to that object."

Mr. Gallatin further remarks that "the venerable Eliot had in his Grammar, published in 1666, exhibited the most prominent features of the Massachusetts dialect." Mr. Mayhew was familiar with this, and the printed treatises to the year of his writing, 1722, and this gives peculiar force to his concluding observation that "the Indian language may seem otherwise than good and regular, is, as I judge, because there is yet no good Gramer made for it, nor are the rules of it fully understood."

Judge Paul Dudley, F.R.S., to whom the letter is addressed, an accomplished man, probably intended to make the information derived from Mayhew the basis of an article for the Transactions of the Royal Society, and it certainly equals in interest and scientific value any of his contributions published by that association.

Chilmark March 20th 1721-22.

Honorable Sir,

Yours of January y^e 6th came safe to my hand ; but the distressed condition of my family since I received it, together with other Incumbrances, and necessary Avocations, (and of Late the want of a convenient opertunity,) have hindered me from sending you an answer till now ; other wise I must have owned myself inexcusable. The Feaver that goes about among us, and of which several have died, came into my family on January y^e 1st, since which time five of my children, and 2 Servants have been vissited with it, two of y^e children, in appearance nigh unto death ; besides my Wife who died March y^e 2nd, and an Infant born alive y^e night before. But now being in hopes of an opertunity spedily to send to you, I am obliged to Shew my willingness to perform what you desire of me.

And in y^e first place as to what you desire respecting the *Lord's Prayer*, I am obliged to tell you, That the Martha's Vineyard Indian Dialect, and that of Natick, according unto w^{ch} last Mr. Eliot translated the Indian Bible, are so very much a Like, that without a very Critical Observation,

you would not see y^e difference, should I send you A Translation of y^e Lord's Prayer according to y^e Dialect, by the Indians here vsed; and therefore y^e doing of it would not at all answer y^e End you aim at. Indeed the difference was something greater than now it is, before our Indians had the vse of y^e Bible and other Books translated by *Mr. Eliot*,³ but since that the most of y^e Little differences that were betwixt y^m, have been happily Lost, and our Indians Speak, but especially write much as those of Natick do. To Speak y^e truth I think most of y^e Indians, not to say all of y^m, betwixt Canada, and New-Spain, inclusively, do speak what was Originally one and y^e same Language; how different soever their Several Dialects may now appear to be. As for those of Canada I am well assured, that their words are many of y^m the same that are here vsed, and I think their way of declineing and compounding of words is the same also; And a few years agoe I discoursed with an Indian that came from South Carolina, and found that I understood several of his Indian words. Having also formerly taken a Little notice of that specimen of y^e Mexican Indian Language w^{ch} *Gage* has given us, I thought I could Easily perceive that their way of Compounding and declineing of words was very much Like that vsed by our Indians.⁴ Let me add that when a few years agoe I vissited

³ Roger Williams, 1643, instances "the great varietie of their Dialects, within thirtie or fortie miles of each other," by the word "Anùm, A Dog.

Anùm,	The Cowweset	} Dialect.
Ayim,	The Narriganset	
Arùm,	The Qunnippiuk	
Alùm,	The Neepmuck	

So that although some pronounce not L nor R, yet it is the most proper Dialect of other places, contrary to many reports." Rhode Island Hist. Colls., i. 96.

⁴ Roger Williams, in his "Key" to the Narraganset Dialect, 1643, says "it is most Spoken," and that "there is a mixture of this Language North and South, from the place of my abode, about six hundred miles; yet within the two hundred miles where ever English dwel betweene the French and Dutch Plantations, their Dialects doe exceedingly differ; yet not so, but (within that compasse) a man may by this helpe [Key], converse with thousands of Natives all over the Country." Rhode Isl. Hist. Coll., i. 18, 25; also Gookin, 1674, says "they use the same language, only with some difference in the expressions, as they differ in several countries in England yet so as they can well understand each other." Mass. Hist. Coll., i. 149; and, 1836, Mr. Gallatin, Mr. Du Ponceau, Mr. Pickering and others, are of opinion "that all the languages, not only of our own Indians, but of the native inhabitants of America from the Arctic Ocean to Cape Horn, have, as far as they have been investigated, a distinct character common to all." Gallatin's Letter to Folsom, Am. Ant. Soc., ii. 5, 142; so Jonathan Edwards in 1788, *ibid.* 35. See also Samuel F. Haven's *Archæology of the U. S.*, Smithsonian Contributions, 1855, 55-72.

the Indians of Connecticut Coloney, I took particular notice of the dialect by them vsed, and tho I found that there was so much difference betwixt theirs and that vsed among us, that I could not well understand their discourses and they much Less understand mine, which obliged me to make vse of an Interpreter, yet I thought the difference was not so great, but that if I had continued there a few months I could have attained to speake inteligably in their dialect. However since these differ more from the Natick Indians than those of the vinyard do; I will here Send you a Translation of the Lord's Prayer according to the Dialect by y^m vsed, having by the help of my Interpreter translated it while I was Among y^m, as it here followeth, viz.

The y^e Lord's Prayer according to y^e Dialect of y^e [Praying Indians?] Nooskun Onkkonwe-Kesukeek weyetuppatameyage Koowesoook kukkuttassootumooonk peâmooutch Koowekontamooonk eyage yeatai Okee oiohktai Onkkouwe Kesukkuk Mesunnan eyeu Kesukohk Asekesukohkish Nupputhekqunnekonum. Quah ohquantamiunnnan Nummattompauwonkanunonash, nânuuk oi Ohquantamoueg Kehehah punniqueoquk. Quah akque eassunnan Mickemwetooonkanuk wepe pokquassunnan wutche Matchetuk. Newutche Kuttike Kuttessootumooonk Mekekooonk quah Kunnontiatamooonk, Micheme quah Micheme. Amen.

I have seen, and once had, but can not now find, A catechism, composed by M^r Peirson of Connecticut, agreeable to the Dialect of the Indians in those parts, and more different from y^t vsed by our Indians than that in the Lord's Prayer here above written. It is possible Judge Sewall⁵ can help you to it.

My Grand Father in his time composed a large and Excellent Catechism for the Indians of this Island, agreeable unto their own Dialect; but not being printed the Original is, I think, utterly lost, and there only remains of it, about 40 pages in Octavo, transcribed as I suppose, by some Indian after his Death; but this goes not so far as to have the Lord's Prayer in it, else I would have sent it to you.

⁵ This excellent man, first in every good work, was zealously interested for the Indians. Cotton Mather, in his "Life of the Apostle Eliot," 1691, p. 116, says, "ought particularly to mention that learned pious and charitable gentleman, the worshipful Samuel Sewall Esq. who at his own charge built a meeting house for one of the Indian Congregations, and gave those Indians cause to pray for him under that character. He loveth our nation, for he hath built us a synagogue."

Whereas you desire some account, of the Peculiarities & Beauties of the Indian Language, and wherein they agre or differ from y^e Europeans, I must, sir, confess to you, That I learnt the Indian Language by Rote, as I did my mother Tongue, and not by Studying the Rules of it as the Lattin Tongue is comonly Learned, besides, as you know I am no Gramarian and therefore shall not be so able to answer your desire, as to this Article in your Letter, as perhaps some others would have been. However, that I may shew My willingness to do what I can, I shall present you with a few observations on y^e Language under consideration, leaving it with your hon^r to compare the same with the Languages of Europe, being myself unskilld in y^m. I shall then observe,

1. That all the articulate soundes vsed by the Indians in these Parts, may be spelt with several Letters fewer, than are vsed by y^e English; for I know of no word in the proper dialect of y^e Indians of this Island, but what may be very well written without any of these seaven Consonants, viz. b, d, f, g, l, r, x. Indeed some of these are frequently to be seen in our Indian books⁶ but in words that are purely Indian, I think unnecessarily: In words derived from the English they are frequently needed.

2. That The Indian vowels are the same with y^e English, save that y is never with y^m vsed as a Vowel, and that o is frequently pronounced through the Nose, much as one would pronounce it with y^e Mouth close shut, thus it is sounded twice in the word ôômuk, the womb, and when it is so sounded we write it as in the example given: yea there is one word that has no other Letter but such a vowel ô unless it should be thought needful to have two of y^m for the drawing out of sound a Little longer. In English y^e word is yea or yes; but there being an other Indian word of y^e same signification⁷ viz *nux* as it is comonly writen, but should rather be *nukkies* in two sillables, the former is scarce ever vsed in writeing.

3. That Dipthongs or Duple sounds are of very frequent vse in the Indian Language as ai, au, ei, ee, eu, eau, oi, oo, œ. Especially oo dipthong is of most frequent vse, there being often two of them together in the

⁶ Mather, 1691, said, "There is a letter or two of our Alphabet, which the Indians never had in theirs, . . . there can scarce be found an R in their language: save that the Indians to the Northward, who have a peculiar Dialect, pronounce the R where an N is pronounced by our Indians." Life of Elliot, 85; see also note ² above.

⁷ Roger Williams says, "They have five or six words sometimes for one thing." Rh. I. Hist. Coll., i. 28.

same word, & in one word that I think of, two oo's Joyned with y^m; thus, *Wosketompo oo oo og*. They are men.

4. That Some Indian words have so many consonants sounded in one and the same Sillible as render the word some what difficult to pronounce, as in this word *Ahquehuhkq*, Let him alone.

5. That In The Indian Language there are so few, if any proper participles that it is unnecessary to reckon the Participle as one Part of their Language, M^r Eliot therefore left it out of his *Indian Gramer begun*: but why he also left out the Preposition I confess I do not understand. That there are not wthstanding, according to him Seaven parts of Speech is because he makes the Nown Adjective a distinct part of Speech, and calls it the *Adnown*, which unto me seems fair, because a Nown Adjective seems to bear the same Relation to y^e Substantive, as the Adverb does unto y^e Verb.

6. That the Indian pronoun is not declined, or varied, except when it is vsed in composition with other words or parts of Speech, and then *I Neen* is varied into *nut*, *noo*, *nun*, *Thou* into *kut*, *koo*, *kun*, &c. So I run is in Indian *nukquokqueem*. My son *nunnamon* [In first mentioning the *Pronoun* I follow m^r Eliot].

7. That the variations of Nowns is not by Genders or Cases as in some other Languages; but, on other accounts as the Numbers, Singular and Plural: Their Nature whether animate or inanimate; Their Magnitude great or small; Their being in present existance or being past and gon; Also when a Nown follows a Verb Transitive as He made; it is diffirently formed from what the thing is other wise called, and alwayes ends in ah or oh. Likewise when a Nown whether singular or plural has any of these signs accompanying of it, viz. In, with, to, from, above, below, on this side, on y^t side, it hath its ending in *ut*, or *at*, as my hand is, *nun-nitckek*, but *into my hand* is *nunnitckekanut*, and from me is *wutch nokkokot*.

8. That the nown adjective or Adnown is declined as well as the Nown Substantive unto which it relateth, I mean y^t it commonly is so, as white Spoken of a Living creature is *wompesoo* but spoken of an Inanimate thing is *wompi*.

9. Respecting Verbes several things may be observed, as (1) There is no compleat and intire word for y^e verb substantive as am, art, is &c. In Indian if a thing be asserted to exist, the way this is done is by adding to the Nown or its relative pronoun a silable or two that have the Nature or

signification of *y^e* verb substantative, as we say, God is. The Indian of this is *Mannitoo oo*. The first too syllabils stand for God the Latter assert his existance. This may be expressed another way, but I reckon this *y^e* best. (2) Other verbs there be both active and passive, as *noowomôn* I Love him. *Nowomonit* am Loved. (3) The most Indian verbs are personal, yet there are some impersonals, as *quenauet* It is necessary. (4) Indian verbs have both *Modes* and *Tenses* belonging to *y^m*. The potential is expressed or signified as it is in English, the other five are known by a deferent conjugation or formation of the verbs. The present Tense and the preter or preter imperfect, are also signified in *y^e* verb itself. The other Tenses are known by such Signs as they are known by in English. (5) Verbes in Indian are both possitive and negative, as *Koowomônush* I Love thee, *Koowomonunoo* I love thee not, *wâmôsek* Love thou me, *wamosekkon* love thou me not &c. Now generally concerning Indian verbes I may say, That in the various conjugations or different formation of them a very great part of *y^e* Indian Language does consist,⁸ for *y^r*in are comprised not only, being, doing, suffering and enjoying, but all *y^e* persons concerned both agents and objects, the preter and present tense, and the object for whom as well as to whom the act is done, &c.

10. Indian Adverbs are words, attending on their Verbs and shew the Quality of *y^e* actions Signified by *y^m*, also their extention, duration, cessation &c. such as in English end in *ly*, comonly in Indian end in *e*, as Strongly is in Indian *munnuke*: and there is this some what remarkable in *y^m*, that where we say very strongly, they make the same word the more emphatical by dubbling a Syllible in it with a little variation, and say *mam-onukke*, *kakunupe*, as the one should say in English strong strongly or quick quickly. In the other parts of Speach I do not at present think of anything remarkable.

11. I may further observe that Indian words, especially, the names of persons and things are generally very significant, by far more so than those of *y^e* English, as the Hebrew also are: For with them, the way vsed was to call every place, Person and thing by a name taken from some thing remarkable in it or attending of it. Thus the place where I dwell is in Indian called *Nempanicklickanuk* in English The place of Thunder-clefts, be-

⁸ Gallatin says, "The principal distinguishing characters of the Indian languages are found in the verb." This letter will be found a very instructive document for comparison with Mr. Gallatin's Synopsis, chap. vi.

cause there was once a Tree there Split in pieces by the Thunder. This is one reason of y^e length of Indian words, they are long that it may appear the better what they Signifie. So *Sin* is called *Matche-usseonk*, an evil work or deed.

12. I shall observe to you that the Indian Language, delighteth greatly in compounding of words; in w^h way they frequently make one word out of several, and then one such word will comprehend what in English is four, five or six; but as by this means they often have much in a Little room, so it is also true that this some times makes their words very long, the Rules of their Language calling for it. It may be you would be willing to understand the Indian way of compounding words. I shall therefore briefly hint something of it to you, and here (1) observe that the words out of which the composition is made are not put at length into y^e word formed out of y^m, but some remarkable part of each of y^m, as some one Syllable or two, such as will show what y^e words are.—(2) That in such composition of words, the Pronoun, or all y^e Persons, 1, 2, 3, Singular and Plural may be, and always are, occasion calling for it, affixed unto Nouns both substantive and adjective, and also unto verbs, I think, of every sort except y^e impersonal, yea & to the Adverb also. (3) The Noun substantive, and noun Adjective, or Adnoun, are ordinarily made one word; and so also y^e verb and y^e Adverb, yea (4) one and the same word may in this way Comprehend in it. An act, The agent by whom performed, The object towards whom, The time when and the manner how: yea tho there are two Agents, which are each of y^m the others object, this with what is already said may be all in one word. For example, These English words, *We did strongly Love one another*, may be but one word in Indian viz, *nummunnukkoowâmônittimunnônup*: So, *they strongly loved one another*, is in Indian, *munnehk-wamôntoopanek*. These indeed are Long words, and well they may considering how much they comprehend in them. However I will give you an Instance of one considerably longer⁹ viz: *Nup-pahk-nuh-tô-pe-pe-nau-wut-chut-chuh-quô-ka-neh-cha-*

⁹ This surpasses the "sesquipedalias" with which Mather in his "Life of Eliot" (Magnalia, 193) astonishes his readers. Roger Williams used the word "*cawkekinnamuk*, y^t is Looking Glasse." Letter to Gov. Leverett, 11 Oct. 1675, published in Appendix of vol. ii. of "Acts of the Com. of United Col. of New England," edited by David Pulsifer, Esq.

A curious inquirer says that "The number of words in the English language exceeding six syllables in length is very small. "Honorificabilitudinitatibus," which is to be found in an old dictionary, is the only English (?) word of eleven syllables that we can call to mind.

Letter of Experience Mayhew.

nehcha-e-nin-nu-mun-nônok here are 58 letters and 22 Syllables, if I do not miss count y^m. The English of this long word is, Our well skilled Looking Glass makers. But after the reading of so long a word you had need be refreshed with some that are shorter, and have a great deal in a little room, I will therefore mention some such, as *Nookoosh*, I have a Father. *Noosis*, I have a grandchild. *Wâmôntek*, Love ye one another. *Wekpittituk*, Let us eat together. *Nishshehehahkon*, *Mamôsekkon*, *Kummootukkon*. These three words are the 6, 7, & 8 commandments. *Sekinyôatekleog* do not ye hate one another. *Noosh* My Father, *Koosh* Thy Father, *Oohskok*, his father, *Nooshun* our Father, *Kooshoo* your Father, *Oohshoowôok* Their Father, *Nooksha* my father that was, (but now is not)

Sir, I shall at present add no more concerning the Indian Language, save in general that I think it good and regular. That it may seem otherwise to Some, is as I Judge, because there is yet no good Grammar made for it, nor are the Rules of it fully understood; As also because Terms of art are not yet fixed on, as in other Languages, (no more capable of y^m yⁿ this is.) Nor are the Indians yet so much beholden to other Nations for words borrowed of them as the English are, or other wise would be much poorer than now they be.

Thus sir, have I endeavoured an answer to your Letter, which tho I have written in hast & in the midst of many incumbrances, and have not Leisure to transcribe and correct, I request you to accept of and wink at the failings you may see in it, in doing of which you will much encourage and oblige, Honorable Sir, Your humble, and already,

much obliged Servant

To the Honorable
Paul Dudley Esq^r.

EXPERIENCE MAYHEW.

P. S. I might have noted respecting verbs, That when an act is continued or repeated, one Syllable in y^e verb is with y^e change of one Letter repeated as I love thee in Indian is *Koowâmonish*, but I Love thee [constantly] is *Koowôwamonish*, and thus it is in every mode of y^e verb.

In other languages still longer words are to be found. "Don Juan Nemopuceno de Buri-onagonatotorecagoeazcoecha was the name of a person employed in the finance department of Spain a few years ago. He ought to have been appointed superintendent of "Kaminagadeyathooroomokanogonagira," or of "Arademaravasadeloovaradooyou," two estates in the East Indies, respecting which a law suit was pending in English courts while he was administering Spanish finances.

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